

VZCZCXRO3574
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #2369 2280519
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 160519Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0839
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KABUL 002369

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA
USFOR-A FOR POLAD

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: NURISTAN ELECTION UPDATE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On August 6th, community leaders and electoral officials from Nuristan's western valley agreed to work together to provide a stable, secure environment for voting, and to identify suitable election workers. On the same day, Provincial Electoral Officer (PEO) Omar Sami named his staff for Nuristan's Operation Coordination Centers (OCCs), where Afghan soldiers and police will work with Coalition Forces support, to provide election security. Western valley leaders expressed willingness to organize local militias for election security. Nuristanis' most frequent complaint about elections was though they wanted to vote, the lack of security and the province's rugged terrain meant many eligible voters could not register in the fall 2008 update. We will continue to work with the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and UNDP election advisors to devise a solution that promotes enfranchisement and uniform access to the polls, while discouraging fraud and perceptions of fraud. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Nuristanis cast 47,142 ballots in the 2004 presidential election, a fraction of the 8,128,942 total in 2004, a number so modest the province would be unlikely to change the outcome even in this year's more competitive contest. In this remote, mountainous province of fiercely independent minority tribes confronting increasing insurgent activity, Nuristan's voting day instead will be a marker of the inclusiveness of the electoral process, and of the willingness of Afghans to defy the Taliban to vote.

¶3. (SBU) On August 6 the district governor of Nurgram, with assistance from TF Steel, hosted community representatives and Independent Election Commission District Field Coordinators (DFCs) from Nurgram, Dow Ab, and Mandol, the three districts of Nuristan's western valley. Nurgram district governor Mohammed Ali opened the shura by saying, "Successful elections are not possible without you," addressing the local leaders as partners to electoral officials, government officials, the police, the army, and Coalition Forces. The Prophet Mohammed, said Mohammed Ali, chose leaders by election, and Afghanistan's constitution reflects this Islamic practice. The senior community leader present, Mohammed Saki from Nangarash, endorsed these sentiments, saying, "The constitution is in the light of Islam" and provides the electoral framework. Democracy, Mohammed Saki added, brings not only the right to choose your own leaders, but facilitates economic development. In consensus, local leaders promised to provide support and hospitality to DFCs, and to facilitate the transport of election materials. DFCs offered to work closely with community leaders to identify suitable deputy DFCs and poll workers.

¶4. (SBU) On security, the elders of Pasini and Mandol offered to rally local militias to support elections, a proposal consistent with Interior Minister Atmar's plan to pay local forces police-equivalent salaries for election security. TF Steel is working now to support this initiative and facilitate the flow of funds from Kabul. A Dow Ab leader, however, said his area needed more police to protect the transit of election materials. PRT Nuristan will highlight this request for the PEO and provincial police chief. PEO Omar Sami on August 6 also named his representatives for each of Nuristan security coordination centers -

the provincial OCC in Nurgram for the western valley, and the satellite OCCs (at COP Keating and FOB Bostick) for the central and eastern valleys.

¶5. (SBU) The August 6 western valley election shura demonstrated again that many Nuristanis are eager to vote but are frustrated that the patchy voter registration process has left some eligible voters without voter cards. One shura participant drew applause when he rose to say that he is "most happy to have elections," and that "our brothers and sisters" among recent returnees, women, and Nuristanis in the remotest valleys who could not obtain voter cards, also want to vote. DFCs present noted that time is now too short for additional registration before voting day on August 20. In support of Nuristanis' evident determination to participate in the democratic process, we will continue to work with the IEC and UNDP to devise a solution that promotes enfranchisement and uniform access to the polls while discouraging fraud and perceptions of fraud.

¶6. (SBU) The PRT commander and the TF Steel commander have reviewed this message.

EIKENBERRY